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SUBJECT: VIETNAMESE ACADEMICS RETAIN SUSPICIONS OF THE U.S.

1. (U) SUMMARY: At least some Vietnamese think tankers continue to view the United States with suspicion, both regarding our international strategy in general and actions more specifically toward Vietnam. Much of the domestic sensitivities by these academics nowadays relate to efforts by "hostile forces" in the U.S. rather than to the USG itself, which demonstrates some progress in thinking. Overall, however, academic influence over GVN and CPV policy is likely limited at best. END SUMMARY.

Using September 11 to pursue unilateralism

2. (U) According to one researcher at the Communist Party of Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh Political Academy, the United States has in recent years been "taking advantage" of its superpower position gradually to establish a "uni-polar order," placing the world under its "hegemony." U.S. national strategy and unilateralism have become "increasingly aggressive" as the USG "continues to interfere" in the internal affairs of many countries, the academic commented, while enhancing its relations with traditional military allies and trying to prevent potential competitors from Asia and Europe from playing important roles in international security issues. September 11th was a turning point in world politics, after which the U.S. took advantage of its "victim status" to seek a speedier unipolarization process, he added.

3. (U) Separately, a researcher from the Institute of American Studies (IAS) analyzed that, with its post-September 11 "alliance," the U.S. had strengthened its central position and created an "unprecedented change" in its relations with major powers such as Russia, China, India, and Pakistan. He claimed that the U.S. had thereby conveniently added the "counterterrorism pretext" to earlier campaigns for globalization and human rights "protection" to safeguard its own interests throughout the world.

4. (U) Another researcher from the Ministry of Defense's Military Strategy Institute argued separately that, after September 11, the U.S. had changed its focus from Europe to the Asia - Pacific region, and took advantage of the "counterterrorism pretext" to "lure, bargain, and build up" pressure on other countries to join the U.S.-led "Counterterrorism alliance." The adjustments in U.S. global strategy towards the Asia - Pacific region had actually made the regional and international situation "more complicated and difficult," he concluded.

Closer to home

5. (U) The IAS researcher further noted that adjustments in U.S. security policy have had an "inevitable" impact on Vietnam, albeit "indirectly," as "Vietnam does not have terrorists." A researcher at the MFA's Institute for International Relations (IIR) opined separately that, although Vietnam had cooperated well with the U.S. on this front, the two countries still do "not have much to do together" in this fight, apart from checking bank accounts, assets, and immigration records of suspected or known terrorists.

6. (U) Recently, Vietnam and the U.S. have taken "big steps" in developing their economic, political, diplomatic, military, and cultural ties, according to the IAS researcher, but still encounter disputes and serious disagreements concerning the catfish/basa shrimp dumping cases, textiles, human rights, democracy, religion, and ethnicity. His conclusion was that the U.S. is trying to "direct" Vietnam toward economic and political reforms that are in the U.S. interest.

Threat levels

7. (U) The MOD researcher claimed that USG campaigns on democracy and human rights in Vietnam reflected a desire to impose U.S. values and gradually to change Vietnam's

political regime, a "real threat" to the CPV and GVN. According to the researcher, the U.S. will not give up the policy of "interference" in Vietnam's internal affairs even as the bilateral relationship continues to develop. Separately, the IIR researcher predicted that there would be no breakthroughs in U.S.-Vietnam relations in the immediate future, since they "have already developed to the temporarily desired extent," except for military-to-military contacts.

18. (U) In a March 2004 article in the CPV's "Communist Review," Dr. Nguyen Van Long, Deputy Director of the Dong Nai Provincial Propaganda Commission, claimed ongoing "attempts by the hostile forces to sabotage socialism," resorting to comprehensive, violent and anti-revolutionary measures to reduce the power of or even "kill" the CPV. He described many recent anti-Vietnam campaigns in the West in which the "hostile forces" -- notably, overseas Vietnamese in the U.S. -- publicly "slandered, distorted, attacked, and smeared" the CPV. He cited a recent letter to Vietnamese leaders, in which "anti-socialism individuals" objected to "the dictatorship by the CPV leaders" and called on CPV leaders "to accept necessary changes, eliminate regulations in the constitution and laws concerning their indispensable leadership rights and return to the Vietnamese the rights to decide their fate and that of their country." He noted a separate request by "exiled" Pham Chinh Tam that the CPV "surrender" and be replaced with the so-called "national council or convention." He explained the recent establishment by overseas "hostile forces" of the "so-called 'Vietnam National Party'" as a "plot to launch massive campaigns to win over communism," and establish a multi-party society and pluralism.

19. (U) In a May 2004 article also in the "Communist Review," Dr. Le Binh of the CPV's Ho Chi Minh Political Academy critiqued perceived "attempts to take advantage of religion and ethnicity against Vietnam's revolution cause." According to Dr. Binh, "hostile forces" pay "special attention" to these issues to "sabotage socialism." He compared these efforts to the collapse of socialism in Poland and socialist countries in Eastern Europe, while insisting that "hostile forces" are now "taking advantage of religion and ethnicity" to conduct "peaceful evolution" and "create violence" to overthrow the GVN, with special attention to the Northwest and Central Highlands. He claimed that these "hostile forces" have taken advantage of Vietnam's policy of open door and multilateralism to influence Protestants here in order to "create disorder" and damage "solidarity," including "illegal missionary work to instigate" ethnic people in the Central Highlands to stage "violent" unrest in February 2001 and April 2004. In addition, the "hostile forces" have recently directed their attention to the military, he claimed, including urging that religious believers study in Vietnam's military academies. Dr. Binh specifically criticized the US-based Ksor Kok for seeking an "independent Dega state" as well as "one very wicked plot" by "hostile forces overseas" to lure ethnic people illegally to cross the border into Cambodia to cause instability. Additionally, he claimed, several VIPs in the USG as well as Vietnamese "reactionary elements" had publicly criticized the GVN for violating religious freedom and human rights, which he concluded was proof that they were "taking advantage" of freedoms of belief and religion, as well as the ethnicity issue, to "sabotage" the revolution of Vietnam.

COMMENT

10. (U) Despite Vietnam's long history of literacy and education, Vietnamese academics and think tankers do not have a notable role in shaping national policy under the CPV. It is often hard to differentiate what is written and said for purely ideological reasons from what the academics personally believe or analyze to be true. Nor is it clear that their expressed views are at all representative of the views of a broader public, although they must reflect the outlook of at least some important elements of the leadership -- or else they would not be published or uttered in this hyper-sensitive and self-censoring society. In any event, clearly some elements of suspicion about U.S. global goals and intentions specifically toward Vietnam remain actively under discussion in academic and official circles. In perhaps a small show of progress, however, the domestic focus against "hostile forces" has become a more generalized threat from overseas "reactionary" or "anti-SRV" individuals and groups, and no longer specifically target the USG as the alleged agent of change -- unlike continued negative comments on what the USG is supposedly doing on the international stage.

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